

Danish Church Records: Research Strategies

by Naomi D. Newbold, B.A.

Family History Library

Church Records are probably the most important records you will use for researching in Denmark. For centuries, the Danish Lutheran Church was the official record keeping entity in the Kingdom, and many different, but useful, genealogical records were created.

History & the Records

Before being able to use church records for research, it is important to understand a bit of Danish history that affected the records. Table 1 has a list of important dates that are important to know.

1573	Oldest church book in Denmark began in Hjordkær parish, Åbenrå County
20 May 1645	King Christian IV sent out a resolution to the bishop of Sjælland ordering all parishes to begin a church book
1646	Jylland and Fyn began keeping church books
1683	King Christian V sent out Den Danske Lov, tightening record keeping laws
1812	2 books began to be kept for every parish
1828	Required to write children's surname in all records
1849	Freedom of religion began
1891	All parishes switch to a standardized record format

Table 1

The church created many different records. These records began at different times throughout the different parishes. Some of the most important records used in genealogical research are christening records, mother's introductions, confirmations, engagements and marriages, burial records, name registers, moving lists, and absolutions.

Church record keeping and styles of records changed throughout the years. Probably the most important changes happened first in 1814, with records switching to table format, and then in 1891, when standardized forms began.

Birth and Christening Records

➤ As the church was first and foremost concerned with a person's spiritual wellbeing it was more important to perform and record the christening rather than the birth.

Mother's Introduction

- A mother was considered "unclean" when she gave birth, and not allowed to participate in church until she had been properly "cleansed."
- An introduction is literally a woman being reintroduced to the congregation of the church.
- Usually happened six weeks after giving birth.
- Mother is rarely at the child's christening due to the unclean rule.
- Many times the introduction date is listed with the birth record

Confirmations

- Made an ordinance in 1736
- Children usually confirmed around age 14
- Considered a semi rite of passage to adult hood
- A person could not have decent work, marry, participate in church, social, or political functions without being confirmed

Engagement and Marriage Records

- Engagements were legally binding contracts
- Needed two witnesses, or bondsmen
- Banns needed to be announced three Sundays before. Banns were meant to allow anyone in the congregation to “object” to the union before the wedding actually happened.

Death and Burial Records

- Like the early christening records, the priests were more concerned about the burial than the death, so it is common to only find a burial date.
- Could only be buried at the church if the deceased had been christened. All others (especially non christened infants) were buried wherever the family could find place or a city/community cemetery (these are rare)
- Later records are more like obituaries

Name Registers

- Meant to be an index to help the priests find other records concerning an individual... only worked as well as the priest kept the record
- Not much genealogical value, but can still be helpful
- Ended in 1891

Moving Lists

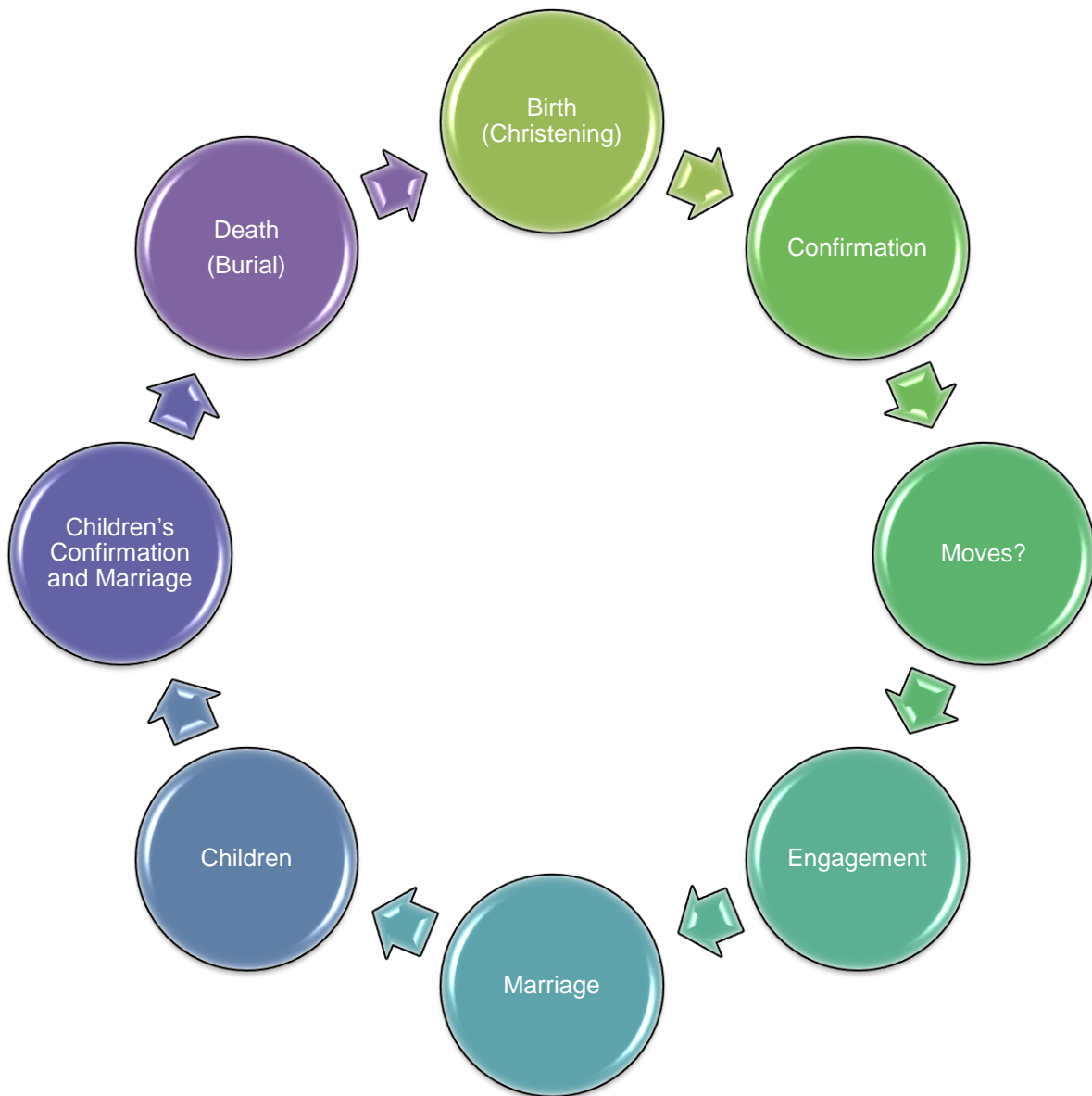
- Every individual needed permission from the priest in order to move in and out of a parish.
- Meant to help the parish keep poor relief burdens down
- After 1875 the responsibility was given to the parish sheriff.

Absolutions

- When someone broke a commandment, they had to stand in front of the congregation or the priest and confess their sin. The most common is for adultery and having an illegitimate child.
- The records vary according to the priest; sometimes there are only names, sometimes complete stories.

Church Record Methodology

- Always follow the life cycle when researching in Denmark. If you don't, it is very easy to get lost, hit a brick wall, connect a child to the wrong parents (and vice versa), etc.
- Always search for the whole family. You may miss valuable clues about your direct line ancestors if you focus just on the direct line.
- Remember – illegitimacy is common. Look for illegitimate children up to at least 5 years before the marriage of the parents.



Websites

- Arkivalieronline www.sa.dk/ao: Digitized church records
- Church Books for Bornholm www.kirkebog.dk: Indexed church records for the island of Bornholm
- Dansk Demografisk Database http://www.ddd.dda.dk/kiip/find_kirkebog.asp : Indexed church records
- FamilySearch www.familysearch.org: Indexed church records

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